

Back to School Tips for Parents

With summer winding down and school starting next week for a lot of kids, what do parents need to do to be ready? Phyllis Henry is a Healthy Families Partnership Board Member, Hampton School Board Member, retired high school principal and proud grandparent. She shared some tips for parents to get ready for school.

Parents should already have their children registered and have already begun receiving communications from their school about the new year. Those communications usually contain information about your child's teacher or schedule, possibly an open house for new parents or new students, how to determine your bus stop, and a list of school supplies. School districts typically post that information on their web sites as well, and don't hesitate to call or stop by your school to ask.

Your child should also be up-to-date on immunizations. Most of the shots have to be completed before kindergarten. However, if you have a sixth grader, there is a booster shot that everyone needs. It's called TDAP and is for Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis or Whooping Cough which seems to be making a comeback. Fortunately, you can get the shots at your local Health Department. In fact, I've seen many pharmacies offering the TDAP, which is also recommended for adult caregivers of small children.

The schools always seem to give parents a lot of paperwork to fill out. In Phyllis' opinion, the most important item to fill out is your child's Emergency Card, one out for EACH child. This is kept on file with the school nurse. Provide as many ways as possible that the school can get in touch with you in case of emergency and alternate emergency contacts. Be sure to write down any health concerns your child has, especially things like asthma or extreme allergies.

You will also receive information about school lunches which will include the forms to apply for free and reduced lunch. Those forms have to be filled out each year. You'll have information about paying for lunch and some schools provide breakfast, as well. Most divisions have an electronic payment system where students have a lunch number. You can pay into their account at your convenience.

Now is a good time to involve your children in planning for the logistics of school. School meals are a good example. Do they want to eat breakfast at home or at school? Do they want to pack a lunch? How are you going to handle going and coming? If they are going to take the bus, do a dry run walk to the bus stop. Think about which of your neighbors might be going and coming to school with them. If your child is going to walk, who could they walk with? Even if you are planning to drop them, when can they be dropped off? Will you car pool? Does someone else need to meet them in the afternoon? These are things you need to decide as soon as possible.

Phyllis recommends considering when everyone has to get up to accomplish the morning routine. A plan backwards activity is a good way to do this. If your child has to be at school at 7:30a and it takes ten minutes to drive, fifteen minutes for breakfast, half an hour for getting the hair fixed, etc. so have your child to set the alarm for 6:15a. It's a good idea to start getting up at that time this week, even though that will be a huge burden for your teenagers, who naturally love to sleep in.

It's also good to help the kids decide about the homework schedule. Will they take a break after school and tackle homework after supper or is it better to get school work over right away so they can watch a favorite program? It's not too early to get out a calendar and figure how to fit in activities like club soccer or ballet class or scouts.

The great thing about school is that it starts fresh every fall. Stress to your child that whatever happened last year, it's a new beginning with new teachers and classmates and that you know that they can be successful. Communicate with the teachers as often as you can and let them know that you want to help them and your child. When you work together, it can be a great year for your child. Don't forget that most school systems have a parent information system on line that will help you keep up with your child's progress and even give things like homework assignments so you really can help your absent minded child. Providing your on-line contact information to the teacher is a good way for them to keep in touch with you about concerns. Be optimistic. Nothing is as important to student success as positive expectations from parents.